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# The Black Sea and NATO in the Age of Access-Denial

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## Abstract

The article explores the implications of the rise of Russian anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities for NATO's Eastern Frontier, especially the broader Black Sea region. The reality is indicative of a broader global trend where assertive revisionist powers are not only questioning the post-1989 rules-based international order, but are also developing the antidotes to the so-called American Way of War, one that largely shapes the NATO operational profile. This type of ecosystem is at the forefront of what Russia has been doing over the past few years in Kaliningrad and Crimea – developing concepts of operations, especially the A2/AD component, that challenge NATO's way of reassuring its frontline allies. The problem is that the NATO caucus in the Black Sea remains highly fragmented in its threat perception. Increasingly close economic and political ties to Russia combined with diplomatic discord concerning the US and NATO makes Turkey a less reliable ally. Meanwhile, Bulgaria's long tradition of close cultural and economic ties to Russia remains concerning. At the same time, NATO needs to do more. The West must understand that its smaller allies don't have the luxury of time or economic power, and must adapt its approach accordingly to credibly reassure its Black Sea allies.

**Keywords:** A2/AD, precision guided munitions (PGMs), Russia, Black Sea, Romania, NATO, offset strategy.

The world in which the North Atlantic Alliance exists has fundamentally changed since the 1990s or even early 2000s. The Crimean annexation by Russia in 2014 marked not only the return of traditional geopolitical competition, but also the rise of a new operational and security

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ecosystem. This article aims to explore the implications of the rise of anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities for NATO's Eastern Flank and especially for the broader Black Sea region.

The two core strategic documents of the Trump Administration, the *National Security Strategy* (NSS, presented at the end of 2017) and the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS, launched in early 2018), provide a realistic diagnosis of the contemporary security environment. Understanding this reality is of utmost importance for Europe because, at the end of the day, it is the setting in which NATO ultimately is operating. From the NSS perspective the world has once again become a place shaped by great power rivalries and competitions "across political, economic and military arenas" with the purpose of shifting "regional balances power in their favor."<sup>1</sup> At the core it remains fundamentally a contest between revisionist and status quo powers, between repressive systems and free societies, between the powers that favor a rules-based international order and the ones for which power rules. For the Pentagon the stakes of the reemerged long-term inter-state strategic competition are about the nature and character of the international order for which the contemporary revisionist powers have other plans, especially in their near-abroads: "China and Russia want to shape a world consistent with their authoritarian model - gaining veto authority over other nations' economic, diplomatic, and security decisions."<sup>2</sup> But the most important feature is that this broader contestation and weakening of the post-WWII and post-Cold War orders happens at a very specific moment in time – when the traditional ways to provide security and reassure allies, especially the ones that have underwritten NATO deterrence for decades, are in crisis. As the NSS points out, the revisionist powers are developing the antidotes to the so-called American Way of War (one that also largely shapes the NATO operational profile) by "fielding military capabilities designed to deny America access in times of crisis and to contest our ability to operate freely in critical commercial zones during peacetime."<sup>3</sup> In its major planning and strategic guiding documents, the Pentagon is recognizing a shifting global environment where traditional US military advantages are contested:

"for decades the United States has enjoyed uncontested or dominant superiority in every operating domain. We could generally deploy our forces when we wanted, assemble

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<sup>1</sup> "National Security Strategy of the United States of America", *White House*, December 2017, p. 25, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America, "Sharpening the American Military's Competitiveness", Department of Defense, January 2018, p. 2, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>3</sup> "National Security Strategy of the United States of America...cit.", p. 27.

them where we wanted, and operate how we wanted. Today, every domain is contested—air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace.”<sup>4</sup>

While the United States and its allies were deeply engaged in the post-9/11 stabilization campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq, powers like China and Russia invested in developing alternative recipes (new capabilities, systems and ways of fighting) to the American traditional competitive advantages, especially the ability to project its power in key strategic theaters like the Eastern Flank of NATO or the Indo-Pacific.<sup>5</sup> This new ecosystem is at the forefront of what Russia has been doing over the past few years in the immediate proximity of NATO territory, particularly in Kaliningrad and Crimea – developing concepts of operations, especially the A2/AD component, that challenge NATO’s way of reassuring and deterring particularly in the frontline regions.

From the perspective of the international relations field, this article operates broadly within the principled realism framework at the core of both the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy. This principled realism provides an overarching framework that should guide most of the policies of the Trump Administration. The classical realist strand recognizes the natural state of the global politics to be a state competition as well as a contest for power and influence. In this context, regional balances of power become the focus of the power competitions. All are foundational features that shape how the NSS and NDS see the current strategic environment. For the Trump Administration, this emergent philosophy was popularized in a famous op-ed written by Lieutenant General H.R. McMaster and Gary Cohn in early 2017 in *Wall Street Journal* stating that “the world is not a global community but an arena where nations, nongovernmental actors and businesses engage and compete for advantage. Rather than deny this elemental nature of international affairs, we embrace it.”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the realist diagnosis of the world is tamed by values and principles. Both documents are anchored in “the realization that American principles are a lasting force for good in the world”<sup>7</sup> and are committed to preserving an international order with favorable balances of power in the key regions that embrace those principles.

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<sup>4</sup> “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America...cit.”, p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Briefing on National Defense Strategy by Elbridge Colby, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and Force Development, Washington Foreign Press Center, 29 January 2018, <https://fpc.state.gov/277746.htm>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>6</sup> H.R. McMaster and Gary Cohn, “America First Doesn’t Mean America Alone”, *Wall Street Journal*, 30 May 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/america-first-doesnt-mean-america-alone-1496187426>. (Accessed 28 August 2018).

<sup>7</sup> “National Security Strategy of the United States of America...cit.”, p. 1.

## Echoes From Different Eras

It is said that although history does not repeat itself it often rhymes. To many observers, the vibe of our time is not very different from the pre-1914 world, a multipolar system marked by intense strategic rivalries and great power competitions. Revisionism is back, while long repressed imperial dreams and impulses are returning at full speed. Both China and Russia want to dominate their near-abroad. Everything is compounded by the assertiveness of a particular type of nationalism – “ugly, unhealthy, xenophobic”<sup>8</sup> that is dominated by impulsive, violent, destructive sentiments. Both contemporary revisionist powers are mobilizing disgruntled historical narratives (China is talking about a century of humiliations while Russia has resurrected the memory of the 1990s) against the so-called liberal international order, one perceived as essentially unjust, imposed at a time of structural weakness, and inimical to their value system.

At the same time, there is increasingly a wide consensus that the current strategic setting is very similar with what happened at the end of the 1970s. Two recent initiatives were shaped by this immediate perception. For example, in its last few years, the Obama Administration’s Pentagon focused significantly on trying to come up with what has been called an offset strategy to counterbalance the advantages of the contemporary competitors. The inspiration came from the solutions developed by the Carter Administration in the late 1970s when it produced the 2<sup>nd</sup> offset strategy. Overall, there was an increased perception of NATO’s decreasing capacity to deter the Soviet Union at a time when the US was dealing with the aftermath of the Vietnam defeat and Moscow was investing massively in its conventional capabilities:

“while we were in Vietnam, the Soviet Union spent a huge amount of money in conventional equipment and technology. By the mid-1970s, there was a pervasive sense that the Soviet Union had achieved conventional superiority. This occurred around the same time the Soviets achieved strategic nuclear parity. Under these circumstances, underwriting NATO conventional deterrence with the threat of battlefield nuclear weapons simply wasn’t credible anymore. In this new context, the U.S. sought to reassert conventional dominance in order to improve strategic stability”.<sup>9</sup>

The architect of the Obama Administration’s offset strategy, Robert Work recognized that he was deeply inspired by the successes of the Carter

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<sup>8</sup> Author interview with Kunihiro Miyake, Research Director at the Canon Institute for Global Studies, Tokyo, Japan, April 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Robert O. Work, “The Role of Offset Strategies in Restoring Conventional Deterrence”, *Small Wars Journal*, 4 January 2018, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/role-offset-strategies-restoring-conventional-deterrence>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

Administration in finding a way out of its broader strategic predicament.<sup>10</sup> A very similar reading was also at the forefront of the current National Defense Strategy. As Elbridge Colby, the main writer and coordinator of the strategy emphasized –

“from a strategic perspective, today we face a situation not unlikely the one in the late 1970s when there was a real perception of the decline of the Western deterrent. Then was mostly about the deterioration of our nuclear advantage, today is more about the increased link between competitive conventional balance combined with the efforts of the competitors to leverage their nuclear forces”.<sup>11</sup>

The decline of the Western deterrence posture is triggered mainly by what observers call the proliferation and the democratization of the effects of the previous Revolution in Military Affairs (whose seeds were planted in the late 1970s and achieved maturity during the first Iraq War with the Desert Storm Operation against Saddam Hussein). While the West developed and invested ever since then in the Desert Storm model, the potential adversaries/competitors studied this particular way of warfare very closely and came up with the antidotes using the very same key components of the RMA in a different way, developing their own precision guided munitions (PGM) battle networks. The broad outcome was an opportunity “for states, and even sub-states, to establish wide anti-access envelopes that will prevent an adversary from closing with their territory, or at least doing so only at a high or even mission defeating cost.”<sup>12</sup> For example, over the almost 30 years since the Gulf War the Chinese have become the preeminent purveyors of anti-access and area denial in the world. They have invested heavily in new technologies including advanced surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems such as the S-400 purchased from Russia, which has an effective operational range (i.e. the ability to engage and destroy a target) of 400 kilometers,<sup>13</sup> fourth and fifth-generation fighter aircraft such as the Russian-made Su-30MKK and the internally developed

<sup>10</sup> Robert O. Work remarks at a roundtable discussion for Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge, 1977-1981, 5 March 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwfTLnV1YS0>, (Accessed 15 August 2018) : “we’ve adapted very much the thinking of the Carter Administration and our thinking was very analogous to the time. (...) we just essentially applied today most of the thinking of Secretary Brown and Dr. Perry.”

<sup>11</sup> Elbridge Colby, former Deputy Assistant Secretary for Strategy and Force Development at the US STRATCOM Deterrence Symposium 2018, 2 August 2018, <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/617007/usstratcom-2018-deterrence-symposium-speed-change>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Albert Pallazo, “Precision and the Consequences for the Modern Battlefield”, *Small Wars Journal*, 19 August 2016, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/precision-and-the-consequences-for-the-modern-battlefield>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Timothy R. Heath, “How China’s New Russian Air Defense System Could Change Asia,” *War on the Rocks*, 21 January 2016, <https://warontherocks.com/2016/01/how-chinas-new-russian-air-defense-system-could-change-asia/>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

Chengdu J-20, and other assets including ballistic missiles, at least four new classes of submarines, aircraft carriers, and other warships including Type-022 *Houbei* fast attack craft equipped with cruise missiles.<sup>14</sup> These military assets combine to create a layered defense that is designed to prevent an enemy from obtaining or maintaining the ability to operate in close proximity to China, to then meet that enemy at a significant distance from the Chinese shore, and slowly attrite their forces as they stay consistently engaged in the Chinese A2/AD zone.<sup>15</sup>

### Why It Matters For NATO

There are immediate regional as well as global consequences that the maturing of these capabilities is generating. From the alliance's perspective what is at stake is the so-called American Way of War, the type of operations associated with what, in the public imagination reminds of the Desert Storm model – the overwhelming use of military power for producing decisive results in conditions of massive superiority in all domains. This overwhelming superiority used to be an inherent advantage of the Western unipolar military power, especially during the 1990s. Now it is increasingly questioned. As retired general Ben Hodges, the former commander of the US Army Europe recently said:

“we have always relied so much on air power and sea power. Russia and China have developed significant A2/AD capabilities that would limit, at least for a period, our ability to fully employ all our air and sea power potential. They've developed military capabilities, systems and doctrines aimed at undermining the American way of projecting power to defend US allies' interests. Credible air defense layers and anti-ship missiles are part of their asymmetric approach in countering the American Way of War”.<sup>16</sup>

Traditionally, a key feature of US military operations is the ability to project its power from afar, from the American homeland to intercontinental distances on the rimlands and peripheries of Eurasia. The rise of mature access-denial bubbles is undermining the whole logic of this way of providing security. They

<sup>14</sup> Toshi Yoshihara, “Anti-access Lessons from the Past,” *Proceedings Magazine*, vol. 139, no. 12, 2013, <https://www.usni.org/node/28403>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>15</sup> James R. Holmes, “U.S. Confronts an Anti-Access World,” *The Diplomat*, 9 March 2012, <https://thediplomat.com/2012/03/u-s-confronts-an-anti-access-world/?allpages=yes>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Octavian Manea, “A Tour of Horizon Interview with Lieutenant General Ben Hodges on NATO Adaptation and the Russian Way of Warfare”, *Small Wars Journal*, 7 August 2018, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/small-wars-journal-interview-lieutenant-general-ben-hodges-nato-adaptation-and-russian-way>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

create a type of no-go areas, or killing-zone – “areas that it would be too difficult or costly to project power across, with the result being a balkanization of the world.”<sup>17</sup> In extremis, for some observers, the diffusion of this operational pattern especially in regions associated with resurgent great-powers may ultimately question “the ability and capacity of US to remain a Eurasian military power”<sup>18</sup> constraining its potential to intervene at long distances. This is an operational problem acknowledged by the senior Pentagon leadership since the Obama years:

“Russian and Chinese adopted 2OS thinking and technologies to erect A2/AD networks to confront our own battle networks. They do so to deter, forestall and disrupt any US power projection operation near their own territory. (...) This is a serious operational problem, and a direct challenge to a global superpower that relies on its ability to project power into distant theaters to underwrite both its alliances and conventional deterrence.”<sup>19</sup>

Historically, the times of perceived parity (in this case, parity in the second offset battle networks) between strategic rivals can trigger the escalatory movements of one side (especially one incentivized by the conscious understanding that traditional ways of deterrence may no longer work). This escalation amplifies a highly volatile security dilemma cycle: “power shifts double the chance of war. Shifts toward parity are most likely to start wars. Ahistorical example of this effect was Germany’s drive to build a fleet the equal of Great Britain’s at the start of the twentieth century”.<sup>20</sup>

This is a point that has a special meaning for the strategic frontiers, for the outer limits of the US system of alliances, especially the ones that are in the proximity of great-powers that manifest hegemonic and anti status-quo instincts, like NATO’s Eastern Flank. From a NATO perspective, reassurance and deterrence should be massively rethought in an age when Russian A2/AD capabilities can neutralize the Alliance potential to defend the Baltic states. This is the reason that the Baltic ecosystem was at the epicenter of the most important post-2014 NATO summits. The defensive package that was developed is a flexible mix of rapid reaction forces, limited advanced forward tripwire presence, new command and control architecture as well as pre-positioned equipment to be used in a crisis scenario. It remains essentially a very traditional answer based on the promise of power projection (as NATO

<sup>17</sup> Albert Pallazo, “Precision and the Consequences...cit.”.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Rosen, “Military Innovation and the Future of US Power Projection”, Modern War Institute, West Point, 18 September 2017, <https://mwi.usma.edu/video-stephen-rosen-military-innovation-future-us-power-projection/>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>19</sup> Work, “The Role of Offset Strategies...cit.”.

<sup>20</sup> James Lacey (ed.), *Great Strategic Rivalries. From the Classical World to the Cold War*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 3-4.



preserved its Cold War defense-in- depth alignment and still has the bulk of its forces postured in Old Europe and not in the East<sup>21</sup>) and the reinforcement of the flanks.<sup>22</sup> The problem is that the Russian A2/AD systems are meant to keep away and complicate the power projection and reinforcement abilities of the Alliance, closing air and sea access to the flanks and exposing NATO with a potential “reinforcement trap”:

“in the case of a major crisis, such as Russia grabbing hand, they could break their way through the Russian bubble by launching a high-intensity electronic-warfare and bombing campaign to destroy the air-defense and land-based cruise-missile systems based in Kaliningrad, which would threaten allied forces. (...) Alternatively, the allies could accept the Russian fait accompli and try to negotiate a withdrawal”.<sup>23</sup>

Both scenarios would have dramatic consequences for European security. The first one implies a direct attack on Russian territory triggering the potential escalation of hostilities while the second would mean the end of NATO as we know it. Both scenarios would confront the Alliance with massive existential dilemmas.

There are signs that by choosing to emphasize an A2/AD posture at the strategic interaction points with NATO territory Russia could be “capable of sealing off the Baltic states in the bubble that covers air, sea and land dimensions”.<sup>24</sup> At the same time by deploying these capabilities “Russia could also be in a position to exploit any regional crisis, whether manufactured or not, declaring air and sea exclusion zones in the region, on the pretext of preventing military escalation”.<sup>25</sup>

There is also another immediate potential threat that should be taken into consideration. The rise of access-denial capabilities is a danger for the global commons, for the international sea and air lanes, for the freedom of navigation that is at the core of international commerce. The proliferation of the A2/AD bubbles and their impact for the regional commons remains a major

<sup>21</sup> Ben Hodges, Janusz Bugajski and Peter B. Doran, “Securing the Suwalki Corridor. Strategy, Statecraft, Deterrence and Defense”, *Center for European Policy Analysis*, Washington, D.C., July 2018, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> Armand Goșu and Octavian Manea, “The consequences of the Militarization of Crimea for the Wider Black Sea Region”, *Studia Politica*, vol. XV, no.1, 2015, pp.14-15.

<sup>23</sup> Fabrice Pothier, “An Area-Access Strategy for NATO”, *Survival*, vol.59, no. 3, 2017, p. 76. Wesley Clark, Jüri Luik, Egon Ramms and Richard Shirreff, “Closing NATO’s Baltic Gap”, *International Centre for Defence and Security*, Tallinn, May 2016, p. 12, <http://www.icds.ee/filead> Min/media/icds.ee/failed/ICDS\_Report-Closing\_NATO\_s\_Baltic\_Gap.pdf. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>25</sup> Study for the Swedish Armed Forces, “Future security challenges in the Baltic Sea Region”, *Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre at British Ministry of Defense*, November 2015, p. 20, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/494595/20151201-Baltic\\_sea\\_regional\\_security.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/494595/20151201-Baltic_sea_regional_security.pdf). (Accessed 15 August 2018).

concern for the Alliance, especially when assessing the military build-ups that Russia prioritized after 2014, particularly in Kaliningrad and Crimea:

“as we see the proliferation of weapons of asymmetric warfare, and I would say submarines, mines, anti-ship cruise missiles, and very sophisticated and accurate coastal radars, in some areas of the world, including in the Baltics and in the Black Sea, and now also in the Eastern Mediterranean, we are observing an Anti-Access/Area Denial strategy, which is one that we need to keep an eye on because it can restrict the ability of commerce and freedom of navigation and sea lines of communication that are in international waters. Those waters are called international waters for a reason. They belong to no one and they are there for all nations to be able to navigate with commercial vessels that contribute to prosperity, and as well, naval vessels that contribute to security”.<sup>26</sup>

Last but not least, the build-up of highly dense access-denial umbrellas is a key advantage during war times, but it may also have immediate peace-time effects. It could be a decisive capability for coercive purposes altering regional behaviors, shifting loyalties and incentivizing contextual bandwagoning positions in decisive moments. As former NATO SACEUR General Breedlove emphasized:

“anti-access/area-denial is a two-edge sword. In times of peace it is a coercive capability/force meaning that they have the ability to affect our use of the Black Sea. It is important in the Black Sea not to allow that coercion to influence what we do. We have to assert that we can and will operate in these areas. The Alliance itself needs to develop a more robust capability to be able to defend against the A2/AD if we ever had to do that. That requires investment, training to take down an air-defense network and a deeper more robust stock of long-range strike capability”.<sup>27</sup>

## Russia And Its Politics

When Crimean voters went to the polls on March 16, 2014 neither of the two options presented on the referendum allowed for maintaining the current status quo. Voters could either vote to join Russia immediately or to return Crimea to its status under the 1992 Crimean Constitution,<sup>28</sup> which granted the “Republic of Crimea...sovereign powers over its territory (including

<sup>26</sup> Remarks by Vice Admiral James G. Foggo, III, the Commander of the Naval Striking & Support Forces NATO, 8 June 2016, <https://nato.usmission.gov/june-8-2016-vice-admiral-james-g-foggo-iii-baltops-2016/>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

<sup>27</sup> Author interview with General Philip Breedlove, former NATO SACEUR, April 2017.

<sup>28</sup> “Crimea Referendum: What Does the Ballot Paper Say?” *BBC*, 10 Mar 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26514797>. (Accessed 15 August 2018).

all resources) and independent foreign relations.”<sup>29</sup> In essence, Crimeans were presented with two options – join Russia now or join Russia later. The presence of Russian military and paramilitary forces in Crimea at the time already made any referendum result suspicious, legally unenforceable, and unrecognizable in any way as a free and fair election. Representatives from the US (including President Obama) and the EU decried the referendum as illegitimate and illegal while simultaneously condemning Russia’s actions violating Ukrainian sovereignty.<sup>30</sup> The UN went so far as to propose a non-binding resolution that affirmed Ukraine’s territorial integrity and said the Crimean referendum “had no validity”.<sup>31</sup> The results of the referendum showed that 83% of eligible Crimeans went to the polls to vote in the referendum and more than 97% of those who voted supported Crimean secession from Ukraine.<sup>32</sup> The fact that such an overwhelming result is unheard of in any type of truly democratic election only served to discredit the referendum even further. The true outcome of the referendum was released, potentially inadvertently, at a later date by The Council under the President of the Russian Federation for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights (Russian Human Rights Council) in a report which stated that voter turnout in Crimea was only 30%, not 83%, and support for secession among those voters was only about 50%, not close to the 97% reported in official results.<sup>33</sup> The Russian Human Rights Council has since put a disclaimer on its website claiming that the report is not an official document and that there is no assessment or presumption of “objectivity and accuracy”.<sup>34</sup> All of

<sup>29</sup> Gwendolyn Sasse, *The Crimea Question: Identity, Transition, and Conflict*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 2007, p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> John B. Bellinger, III and Jonathan Masters, “Why the Crimean Referendum is Illegitimate”, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 16 Mar 2014, <https://www.cfr.org/interview/why-crimean-referendum-illegitimate/>, accessed 20 August 2018; “Crimea Referendum: Voters ‘Back Russia Union’,” *BBC*, 16 Mar 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26606097>. (Accessed 20 August 2018).

<sup>31</sup> “Backing Ukraine’s Territorial Integrity, UN Assembly Declares Crimea Referendum Invalid”, *UN News*, 27 Mar 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/03/464812-backing-ukraines-territorial-integrity-un-assembly-declares-crimea-referendum>. (Accessed 20 August 2018).

<sup>32</sup> Andras Racz, “Russia’s Hybrid War in Ukraine: Breaking the Enemy’s Ability to Resist”, *Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, FIIA Report 43, Helsinki, 2015, p. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Roderick Gregory, “Putin’s ‘Human Rights Council’ Accidentally Posts Real Crimean Election Results”, *Forbes*, 5 Mai 2014, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/paulroderickgregory/2014/05/05/putins-human-rights-council-accidentally-posts-real-crimean-election-results-only-15-voted-for-annexation/#6a89fd8f1727>. (Accessed 20 August 2018).

<sup>34</sup> Evgeniy Alexandrovich Bobrov, “Problems of Crimean Residents”, *Council Under the President of the Russian Federation for the Development of Civil Society and Human Rights*, 22 Apr 2014 (updated 7 Mai 2014), [http://president-sovet.ru/members/blogs/bobrov\\_e\\_a/problemy-zhiteley-kryma/](http://president-sovet.ru/members/blogs/bobrov_e_a/problemy-zhiteley-kryma/). (Accessed 20 August 2018).

these issues – an unprompted invasion with military troops, a forceful takeover of the Crimean Parliament, a referendum conducted under duress and with falsified results, and the ensuing international outcry – would be problematic for Russia and its goals in Crimea if Russia was concerned with anything more than creating a thin veneer of political legitimacy to its actions.

In reality, there was no chance of political legitimacy anywhere except in Russian propaganda. This was assured by the 1994 Budapest Memorandum signed by the United States, Russia, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom, which guaranteed the denuclearization of Ukraine in exchange for guarantees regarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity. The treaty was more for the three great powers at the table than it was for Ukraine, a country that just happened to be holding almost 2,000 nuclear weapons when the Soviet Union collapsed. In the Budapest Memorandum the US, UK, and Russia agreed that they wouldn't use economic coercion to influence Ukraine nor would they occupy Ukrainian territory militarily. If military occupation did occur it would be considered illegal and the nations would consult to resolve any questions concerning the commitments identified in the document.<sup>35</sup> Twenty years later, the Budapest Memorandum would become null and void in any practical sense when the invasion and annexation of Crimea and Russia's admission of its involvement in these events was met with a lot of diplomatic bluster from the West, but almost nothing of actual substance beyond economic sanctions. The ramifications of those actions weren't felt solely by Russia. For many of the smaller countries in Central Asia and the Black Sea region "it became understood that institutions of international guarantees on the example of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 do not work, and the US and Britain failed to fulfill their obligations towards Ukraine".<sup>36</sup> To the Americans, the British, and the Russians, the Budapest Memorandum is just one agreement in an ongoing process that dates back to the Yalta Accords following World War II. For the less powerful states, the Russian invasion had a much more profound impact. Leonid Kuchma, the former president of Ukraine who signed the Budapest Memorandum for Ukraine, said that Ukraine had been "cheated"<sup>37</sup>, while Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said that the actions of Russia proved that "international law is merely a tool for powerful states to force the weaker states to do what they want".<sup>38</sup> After the West offered minimal resistance to Russia's

<sup>35</sup> Ron Synovitz, "Explainer: The Budapest Memorandum and its Relevance to Crimea", *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, 28 Feb 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-explainer-budapest-memorandum/25280502.html>. (Accessed 20 August 2018).

<sup>36</sup> David Shahnazaryan and Ruben Mehrabyan, "Security in the Caspian – Black Sea Region After 2014: Views from Armenia", *Black Sea Security*, vol. 1, no. 29, 2017, p. 26.

<sup>37</sup> Steven Pifer, "The Budapest Memorandum and US Obligations", *Brookings*, 4 Dec 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2014/12/04/the-budapest-memorandum-and-u-s-obligations/>. (Accessed 20 August 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Shahnazaryan and Mehrabyan, "Security in the Caspian...cit.", p. 26.

actions in Crimea, the perception of the international order shifted. Russia was emboldened to take further action to cement its gains in Crimea.

Andrey Kurkov writes in *Ukraine Diaries*, “I am...an ethnically Russian citizen of Ukraine. But I am not ‘a Russian,’ because I have nothing in common with Russia and its politics”.<sup>39</sup> The concept of “Russia and its politics” that Kurkov references is a complex phenomenon that can’t be adequately discussed in only a few pages. It is worthwhile, nevertheless, to momentarily consider those aspects of Russian politics that are relevant to its approach to international relations and A2/AD. The devastation and subjugation caused by the Mongol Hordes permanently affected the psyche of the Russian people and serve as a bridge between the cultural history of Russia and its political history and ideology. The Mongols themselves left Eastern Europe nearly 1,000 years ago and their descendants in Central Asia, while sometimes a nuisance, have rarely been a serious threat to remove Russia from its position of preeminent power. This long-term reign in a position of power hasn’t been enough for the Russians to escape their past with regards to the Mongols whose physical retreat was not accompanied by a coinciding psychological withdraw. This psychological impact is ever-present in Russian foreign policy creating a worldview and ideology encompassed by the idea that “after the Mongol invasion and rule all Russian politics were post-traumatic”.<sup>40</sup> At different times throughout history Russian foreign policy has been summed up as “the red fortress,” “the Soviet fortress,” “the nationalist fortress,” “the besieged fortress,” and most recently “fortress Russia”.<sup>41</sup> When examining Russian foreign policy, this idea of Russia as a fortress is an inescapable and recurring theme; the word *kremlin* itself derives from the Russian word for “citadel”. It is the base that underlies nearly every other decision and facet of Russia’s foreign policy. Outsiders conquered Russia once and the government must never let that happen again. The Russian Fortress is both ideological and physical; it attempts to conquer and control both territories and minds. It both protects and promotes Russia throughout Central Asia and the world. A fortress is designed for protection, but it’s also a symbol of power, and in the Leninist and Stalinist set of core values still prevalent in Russian government today, “expansion is the embodiment of power”.<sup>42</sup> In this way, territorial expansion becomes a central

<sup>39</sup> Andrey Kurkov, *Ukraine Diaries: Dispatches from Kiev*, Harvill Secker, London, 2014, E-book edition.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Lourie, *Putin: His Downfall and Russia’s Coming Crash*, Thomas Dunne Books, New York, 2017, p. 131.

<sup>41</sup> Andis Kudors (ed.), *Fortress Russia: Political, Economic, and Security Development in Russia Following the Annexation of Crimea and its Consequences for the Baltic States*, Centre for East European Policy Studies, Riga, 2016, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> Dmitry Oreshkin, “Putin’s Third Term Ideology”, Andis Kudors (ed.), *Fortress Russia: Political, Economic, and Security Development in Russia Following the Annexation of*

aspect of Russian foreign policy, of “Fortress Russia”, but those in charge must always be careful to play the role of the victim. Expansion can’t be about imperialism or domination, it is expressed in terms of protecting the Russian people, culture, interests, and way of life from outside forces that would seek to destroy it. Those outside forces constantly seeking to destroy Russia must not only be prevented from reaching the heart of Russia in Moscow but must also be stopped from any encroachment on the Russian way of life. The Kremlin is not only the protector of Russia, but of all Russians everywhere. Through this line of thinking, the Russian diaspora becomes a consistent crutch and key aspect of Russian foreign policy.

When trying to optimize its diaspora as a foreign policy tool, “the political establishment oscillates between an attempt to instrumentalize the Russian diaspora for the purpose of projecting Russia’s power on its neighbors and the fear that Russian diaspora would develop into a ‘shadow’ Russia, capable of questioning the legitimacy of the Kremlin”.<sup>43</sup> In spite of these potential threats, Russia has still devoted considerable energy to coopting its diaspora since the collapse of the Soviet Union. From 1992-1994, the “Yeltsin Doctrine” or “the Russian Monroe Doctrine” offered protection for the human rights of Russian-speaking minorities in former Soviet states and allowed Russia to intervene politically or militarily, if necessary, to protect the interests and rights of that diaspora. It was a valuable tool in attempting to maintain Russian influence over the domestic affairs of the former Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> Under President Putin this idea continued to flourish starting in 2001 with the signing of “The Conception for Support of Compatriots” and the First International Congress of Compatriots.<sup>45</sup> According to Russian policy, the term *compatriot* as used in these and other situations includes, “Russian Federation citizens living abroad, former citizens of the USSR, Russian immigrants from the Soviet Union or the Russian Federation, descendants of compatriots, and foreign citizens who admire Russian culture and language”.<sup>46</sup> Operating with such an expansive definition of what constitutes a member of the Russian diaspora allows the Kremlin to essentially act wherever and however it desires in the name of national interest and protecting the human rights of ethnic Russians in its diaspora. In the post-Soviet world Russia traditionally used soft power methods to increase its sphere of influence with regards to its diaspora, but it has always reserved the right since the days of the “Yeltsin Doctrine” to act militarily if necessary, and its recent actions in Crimea demonstrate a

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*Crimea and its Consequences for the Baltic States*, Centre for East European Policy Studies, Riga, 2016, p.12.

<sup>43</sup> Mikhail Suslov, “‘Russian World’: Russia’s Policy Towards its Diaspora”, *IFRI*, no. 103, July 2017, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Oñcel Sencerman, “Russian Diaspora as a Means of Russian Foreign Policy”, *Revista de Științe Politice*, no. 49, 2016, p.101.

<sup>45</sup> Mikhail Suslov, “‘Russian World...cit.”, p.20.

<sup>46</sup> Sencerman, “Russian Diaspora...cit.”, p.102.

willingness to use hard power methods if they're considered necessary or useful.<sup>47</sup> "Fortress Russia" presents itself as always willing to protect its diaspora whenever needed, which impacts its use of A2/AD as a tool of its foreign policy.

Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has never seen itself as anything other than a great power that deserves "particular rights within its immediate region, a special role in deciding international disputes, cooperation with other great powers, and a greater degree of autonomy or sovereignty."<sup>48</sup> Whereas the United States and the West view the Soviet Union's actions in Eastern Europe as a violation of the Yalta Agreement that played a large role in the development of the Cold War, Russia similarly views the US with suspicion because of NATO's expansion to the east. There's a famous story, though it's perhaps apocryphal, that in 1990 US Secretary of State James Baker told Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev that "if he pulled Soviet troops out of East Germany and permitted the peaceful reunion of the two Germanys, NATO, in return, would not move 'one inch east'."<sup>49</sup> From Russia's point-of-view, the fact that NATO has moved thousands of miles east since 1990 is both a challenge to its interests in the "near abroad," a threat to its security, and the infringement of a gentlemen's agreement between the US and the Soviet Union. This idea has been revisited multiple times during the intervening 30 years of US-Soviet relations. President Boris Yeltsin told President Bill Clinton in 1997, "Our position has not changed. It remains a mistake for NATO to move eastward."<sup>50</sup> President Vladimir Putin has spoken consistently against NATO enlargement as a direct threat to Russian interests and the 2008 announcement that NATO would eventually accept Ukraine and Georgia as members played a crucial role in Putin's decision to invade Georgia in order to display power, demand respect, and maintain control in Russia's sphere of influence. NATO enlargement is the Russian counter to western accusations of the post-Yalta Eastern Bloc and is the preexisting justification for its actions violating the Budapest Memorandum and invading Ukraine. In the Russian mind, Yalta divided Europe and, though the Soviet Union no longer exists, Russian interests still do.

### Decoding The Russian Military A2/AD Footprint In The Black Sea

Following the Russians eventual expulsion of the Mongols and the founding of the Tsarist Empire, "the driving force of Russian civilization became the avoidance of and preparation for the next invasion," which "induces

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, 103.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, "Russian Views of the International Order", *RAND Corporation*, Santa Monica, CA, 2017, p. 17.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Lourie, *Putin...cit.*, p.141.

<sup>50</sup> Radin and Reach, "Russian Views of the International Order...cit.", p. 43.

suspicion and conservatism, xenophobia, paranoia, and an imperialism that seeks to buffer the heartland with as much territory as possible".<sup>51</sup> This succinct statement is not only the core of Russian psychology, but also the essence of what motivates and perpetuates Russian A2/AD. The constant, lurking fear that an invader is always at the gates and ready to conquer Mother Russia in the briefest moment of weakness manifests itself in a protectionist and expansionist foreign policy and an offensive, "kill or be killed" approach to international relations.

Since 2014 and continuing in the present, Russia has been working to expand its A2/AD bubble and "the modernization of the Black Sea Fleet and the deployment of new weapons systems on the captured peninsula...will strengthen Moscow's ability to challenge NATO's presence and undermine the security of littoral states".<sup>52</sup> As of now, "Russia has A2/AD in Kaliningrad, Crimea, and Syria, and analysts have been arguing whether this...is a new *modus operandi* for Russia".<sup>53</sup> Clearly, A2/AD is a method of defense that Russia intends to use well into the future and its efforts in Crimea and Syria have significantly enhanced those capabilities.

The Iskander-M, known to NATO as the SS-26, is a weapon system with a range between 400 kilometers (250 miles) and 480 kilometers (300 miles) according to various sources. It has been operationally deployed in both Syria<sup>54</sup> and Crimea,<sup>55</sup> and sources state that Israeli intelligence has reported possible launches of an Iskander-M missile against ISIS forces from Latakia Air Base Syria.<sup>56</sup> A system with this range can have a significant impact on the ability of forces to penetrate into territory that is controlled by either Russia or countries allied with Russia. An Iskander system in Crimea could reach NATO member states Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania depending on its range and specific location in Crimea. An Iskander-M based at Sevastopol would be able to hit Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base in Romania, a key forward operating base

<sup>51</sup> Richard Lourie, *Putin...cit.*, p. 131.

<sup>52</sup> Janusz Bugajski and Peter B. Doran, "Black Sea Rising: Russia's Strategy in Southeast Europe", *Center for European Policy Analysis*, February 2016, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Riina Kaljurand, "The Annexation of Crimea and its Implications for the Baltic States' Security", Andis Kudors (ed.), *Fortress Russia: Political, Economic, and Security Development in Russia Following the Annexation of Crimea and its Consequences for the Baltic States*, Centre for East European Policy Studies, Riga, 2016, pp. 177-178.

<sup>54</sup> Tamir Eshel, "New Evidence of Russian Iskander-M Missile Deployment in Syria", *Defense Update*, 6 ianuarie 2017, [http://defense-update.com/20170106\\_iskander-in-syria.html](http://defense-update.com/20170106_iskander-in-syria.html). (Accessed 17 May 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Interfax-Ukraine, "Ukraine Military say Russia Deploys Iskander Air Defense Missiles in Crimea", *Kyiv Post*, 4 December 2014, <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-military-say-russia-deploys-iskander-air-defense-missiles-in-crimea-374075.html>. (Accessed 17 May 2018).

<sup>56</sup> Ami Rojkes Dombe, "Possible Iskander Missile Launch in Syria", *Israel Defense*, 26 January 2017, <http://www.israeldefense.co.il/en/node/28346>. (Accessed 17 May 2018).



for US and NATO forces. As far back as 1992, Indian Brigadier General V.K. Nair said that access to forward basing would be “by far the trickiest part of the American operational problem.”<sup>57</sup> An Iskander system in Sevastopol can take advantage of this exact problem by denying free usage of a critical NATO base in Romania.

While elite ground forces and long-range surface-to-surface ballistic missiles can gain, control, and hold ground, one of the ways they are most vulnerable is via attack from the air. Similarly, centers of gravity that can't be reached by land forces or land-based ballistic missile systems are subject to attack from aircraft whose range can extend for hundreds of miles or even thousands of miles with air-to-air refueling. Due to the susceptibility of ground forces and high-value strategic targets to aerial attack and the devastating impact that can result, it becomes imperative for a developed, effective A2/AD network to include aerial defenses. These defenses must be able to meet, attrite, and ideally defeat adversary air forces at sufficient distances that they never become threatening to one's protected territory. Although, early warning radar systems are a critical part of any Integrated Air Defense System (IADS), the concentration with regards to Russian A2/AD will be on the other major components of their IADS, namely their fighter and bomber aircraft and their SAM systems.

The first layer of A2/AD protection in the air domain comes from aircraft that have the ability to fly long distances and threaten and attack both adversarial air and ground assets. In November 2014, *Sputnik* announced that ten Su-27SM “Flanker” and four Su-30 “Flanker-C” had been dispatched to Crimea.<sup>58</sup> The Su-30 is a newer, upgraded model of the Su-27SM, but both aircraft are fourth-generation fighter jets and among the best, most lethal aircraft in Russia's inventory. They have an effective range of over 3,500 kilometers (1,900 miles) depending on their weapons configuration, and both jets can carry a combination of up to ten air-to-air missiles including the advanced AA-10 “Alamo” infrared missile and AA-11 “Archer” semi-active radar missile capable of destroying enemy air assets at reported ranges of greater than 80 kilometers (50 miles). Almost a year later, in September 2015, *Newsweek* reported a plan for Crimea to receive thirty new Su-30SM aircraft.<sup>59</sup> The Su-30SM is a slightly modified version of the Su-30 aircraft received in 2014, but

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Andrew Krepinevich, Barry Watts, & Robert Work, “Meeting the Anti-Access and Area-Denial Challenge”, *Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments*, Washington D.C., 2003, p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> “Photo: Russian Airbase in Crimea Reinforced by New Fighter Jets”, *Sputnik*, 26 November 2014, <https://sputniknews.com/military/201411261015194983/>. (Accessed 17 May 2018).

<sup>59</sup> Damien Sharkov, “Russia Tests New Fighter Bombers in Crimea”, *Newsweek*, 8 September 2015, <http://www.newsweek.com/russia-tests-new-fighter-bombers-crimea-369776>. (Accessed 17 May 2018).

with similar weaponry and ranges. Most telling is that the number increased sevenfold from four to thirty over the course of just one year, and that these aircraft are among the newest and most advanced aircraft in the Russian inventory. When they were deployed to Crimea, in 2015, Russia had just begun ordering and operationalizing its first large number of Su-30SM aircraft after successful test runs in 2012.<sup>60</sup> Russia was clearly making a statement to the international community, particularly the US and EU, that Crimea was a part of Russia and that it would use its most advanced, expensive, and capable assets in order to defend territory that it considered its own.

Along with fighter aircraft, Russia has also deployed a squadron of Tu-22M3 “Backfire-C” bombers as well as Tu-95 “Bear” and Su-34 “Fullback” aircraft.<sup>61</sup> Although, the Su-34 is technically classified as a fighter because of its ability to engage other aircraft in air-to-air conflict, its primary focus is on air-to-ground engagements. Not only is the Su-34 capable of carrying laser guided and GLONASS satellite guided bombs, “those weapons are...almost exclusively carried by the Su-34”.<sup>62</sup> The ability to use precision weapons allows for greater specificity when targeting objectives that can mitigate collateral damage and increase the odds of hitting the appropriate target. This feature can be extremely valuable when targeting ships as it allows for precise placement of the weapon to maximize damage to the ship’s frame or to key command and control areas of the ship. The deployment of the bombers has left some analysts confused as there doesn’t appear to be a strategic purpose for them in Crimea.<sup>63</sup> However, recently Russia ran an exercise using Tu-95 airplanes to bomb strategic targets within Ukraine.<sup>64</sup> It’s not a difficult logical leap to see this as preparation or training for a potential strategic bombing raid in NATO countries bordering the Black Sea. Perhaps more importantly, the Tu-22M3 and Tu-95 are capable of carrying Kh-101 and Kh-102 cruise missiles, which have a reported range of up to 4,000 kilometers (2,500 miles).<sup>65</sup> Russia used both the Kh-101 and the older Kh-555 in Syria launched from Tu-95 bombers and, although there appear to be temporary setbacks in terms of the expected performance of

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>61</sup> Pavel Aksenov, “Why Would Russia Deploy Bombers in Crimea?”, *BBC Russian*, 24 July 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-33649298>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>62</sup> Gary Wetzel, “Russia’s Involvement in Syria Proves that It’s Far Behind the Western World”, *Foxtrot Alpha*, 5 May 2017, <https://foxtrotalpha.jalopnik.com/russia-s-involvement-in-syria-proves-that-its-far-behind-1794966734>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>63</sup> Pavel Aksenov, “Why Would Russia Deploy...cit.”

<sup>64</sup> “Russian War Pilots in Crimea Train to Strike Mainland Ukraine”, *UNIAN Information Agency*, 15 February 2018, <https://www.unian.info/politics/10009112-russian-war-pilots-in-crimea-train-to-strike-mainland-ukraine.html>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>65</sup> Stephan Fruhling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, “NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge”, *Survival*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2016, p. 101.

one or both air-launched cruise missiles,<sup>66</sup> it's anticipated that Russia will make any desired or required modifications and bring the cruise missiles back into the inventory as quickly as possible. The A2/AD implications of these bombers with these weapons in Crimea are readily apparent. A bomber such as the Tu-22M3 or Tu-95 could stay in Russian airspace, or even over international waters in the Black Sea, Baltic Sea, or Atlantic Ocean and fire air-launched cruise missiles with the ability to reach nearly any target in Europe. It's unlikely that this type of scenario would occur, and such an attack would indicate a transition from A2/AD to offensive operations, but the vast range of these weapons is something NATO and the US must consider when permanently basing or mobilizing troops.

The final, and perhaps most important, part of Russia's A2/AD defenses in the air domain comes from their technologically advanced, extremely effective, and highly lethal surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems. Russia possesses both the S-300 (NATO: SA-10 or SA-20 depending on the variant) and S-400 (NATO: SA-21) SAM systems. Later variants of the S-300 had improved warheads, better guidance systems, and the ability to engage targets at a range of 200 kilometers (125 miles). The S-400 is a drastic upgrade over even these impressive numbers. Russian claims suggest that the S-400 can simultaneously engage up to 36 targets of various sizes ranging from aircraft all the way down to cruise missiles at ranges of up to 400 kilometers (250 miles).<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, the S-400 has been deployed to Latakia,<sup>68</sup> the S-300 was sent to Tartus in 2016,<sup>69</sup> and both weapon systems have been observed on the Crimean Peninsula including two S-400 battalions, one outside Feodosia and one near Sevastopol.<sup>70</sup> Such highly advanced systems with incredible ranges pose a significant threat and are inordinately valuable from an A2/AD perspective. These types of SAMs "would significantly improve Russian A2/AD capability...by enabling wide-area and highly responsive anti-air coverage while simultaneously decreasing the demands on Russian fighters to

<sup>66</sup> Gary Wetzel, "Russia's Involvement in Syria Proves that It's Far Behind the Western World", *Foxtrot Alpha*, 5 May 2017, <https://foxtrotalpha.jalopnik.com/russia-s-involvement-in-syria-proves-that-its-far-behind-1794966734>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>67</sup> Stephan Fruhling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, "NATO, A2/AD...cit."

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Marcus, "Russia S-400 Syria Missile Deployment Sends Robust Signal", *BBC*, 1 December 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34976537>. (Accessed 18 May 2018)..

<sup>69</sup> "Syria Conflict: Russia Sends Missile System to Tartus Base", *BBC*, 4 October 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-37557138>. (Accessed 17 May 2018).

<sup>70</sup> Phil Stewart, "Russia Deployed a Second Division of its S-400 Missile Defense System to Crimea – and the US is Worried", *Business Insider*, 16 January 2018, <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-us-warily-eyeing-new-russian-air-defenses-in-crimea-2018-1>. (Accessed 17 May 2018).

maintain combat air patrols”.<sup>71</sup> The systems’ radars could track aircraft, drones, or missiles nearly from the moment of takeoff or launch and either force them to retreat or destroy them if they got close enough to become threatening, all without requiring the costs and risks entailed with sending expensive fighter aircraft to engage in aerial combat. One of the few ways to attack such a system is by saturating its radar picture, but that would require a significant investment of financial and material resources that the adversary might not be willing to make. This is the entire purpose of A2/AD zones, not to ultimately defeat the enemy, but to discourage a stronger enemy from attacking. The immense range and highly sophisticated targeting capabilities of the S-300 and S-400 make them incredibly important pieces of the Russian A2/AD system in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean zones.

However, the most valuable domain for Russia’s A2/AD operations in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean zones is probably at sea. As Ilan Berman wrote regarding the “distinctly military project” of annexing Crimea –

“The Crimean city of Sevastopol has long served as the home port for Russia’s Black Sea Fleet (via a long-term lease from the Ukrainian government), and the region is vital to Russia’s ability to project naval might. Moscow’s annexation of the territory has been followed by a major, systematic expansion of Russia’s military presence there—and, by extension, in the Black Sea region”.<sup>72</sup>

The Black Sea Fleet in its present composition includes 45 warships and 7 submarines, which comprises slightly more than 20% of the entire Russian naval fleet. Of those, ships and submarines, nearly 90% are in Crimea – 80% at Sevastopol and 9% at Feodosia.<sup>73</sup> Two new ships, *Zelyonly Dol* and *Serpukov*, joined the Black Sea Fleet in late 2015. Each ship was outfitted with the Kalibr-NK missile system that can fire either 3M54 (NATO: SS-N-27 “Sizzler”) anti-ship cruise missiles (ASCM) at a range of up to 250 kilometers (155 miles) or 3M-14 (NATO: SS-N-30A “Kalibr”) land attack cruise missiles (LACM) up to 2,500 kilometers (1,550 miles).<sup>74</sup> Incorporating these upgrades, along with its six *Kilo*-class submarines in the Black Sea, means that there are no nearby countries with a competitive or comparable navy to that posed by the Black Sea Fleet.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, the Kalibr-NK missile system has been employed and is still

<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Altman, “Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Growing Risk”, *Naval War College Review*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2016, p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Ilan Berman, “How Russian Rule Has Changed Crimea”, *Foreign Affairs*, 13 July 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/eastern-europe-caucasus/2017-07-13/how-russian-rule-has-changed-crimea>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>73</sup> Alex Schneider, “Russia’s Black Sea Fleet Buildup”, 29 March 2017, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/russias-black-sea-fleet-buildup#gs.qu5tmC4>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>74</sup> Bugajski and Doran, “Black Sea Rising...cit.”, p.12.

<sup>75</sup> Bugajski and Doran, “Black Sea Rising...cit.”, p.13.

available for use in both the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean by the Black Sea Fleet and its 15-ship Mediterranean Task Force,<sup>76</sup> which creates a massive A2/AD bubble for both land and sea forces that encompasses all of Eastern Europe and most of the Mediterranean Sea.

In addition to its naval modernization efforts through the State Arms Procurement program of 2011-2020 (SAP 2020) under which Moscow will spend \$151 billion on its entire navy and \$2.4 billion on the Black Sea Fleet alone by 2020,<sup>77</sup> Russia has also established coastal defense missile systems in Crimea and Syria. The coastal missile defense is primarily provided by the Bastion-P (NATO: SS-C-5) system which is capable of launching the P-800 Oniks (NATO: SS-N-26) ASCM with a maximum range of 300 kilometers (186 miles).<sup>78</sup> The mere presence of the P-800 Oniks in Syria, without factoring in Russian ships or other ASCM or LACM weapons, “has been enough to create a surface naval A2/AD zone in the northeastern corner of the Mediterranean”.<sup>79</sup> The coastal defense systems in Syria and Crimea add one more layer of defense to an already complex and effective A2/AD system.

Even without a highly detailed analysis, it’s still evident that the multiple layers and extended ranges of the weapon systems within the military element of Russia’s A2/AD operation across the land, air, and sea domains do not form an impenetrable wall around the border. They do, however, pose a formidable threat that must be respected. Russia is not invincible, but it doesn’t have to be. The Kremlin just needs to make the cost of attack outweigh the benefits of victory. The annexation of Crimea, the alliance with Syria, and the expansion and use of advanced military equipment in those areas are critically important steps in achieving that objective.

## Implications For The NATO Members In The Black Sea

Events in international relations don’t occur in a vacuum and their ramifications extend beyond their borders to impact an entire geographic zone. Such is the case now as Russia’s establishment of an A2/AD zone based out of Crimea and Syria has significant repercussions for the Black Sea region as a

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<sup>76</sup> Tom O’Connor, “Russia Says Missile Ships Will Stay Near Syria, Challenging US in Middle East and Europe”, *Newsweek*, 16 May 2018, <http://www.newsweek.com/russia-says-missile-ships-will-stay-syria-challenging-us-middle-east-europe-930027>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>77</sup> Bugajski and Doran, “Black Sea Rising...cit.”, p.12.

<sup>78</sup> “Bal and Bastion: Meet Two Coastal Defense Systems Russia Deployed to Kurils”, *Sputnik*, 22 November 2016, <https://sputniknews.com/military/201611221047718343-bal-bastion-defense-systems/>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Altman, “Russian A2/AD in the Eastern Mediterranean...cit.”, p.3.

whole. After the fall of Communism, the West's interest in the Black Sea region as a strategic location declined, while Moscow still required its warm water ports and viewed it as the same "Russian Lake" it had always been in the Russian worldview. Over time, the strategic value of the Black Sea region has grown in the West, but while NATO and the EU have a vested interest in the Black Sea region and in protecting their member states located in that area, there is still a distinct difference in the way the Black Sea region is generally viewed by the West and by Russia. As Martin Sokolov explains, "The EU sees it as its *neighborhood* where, along with its current members, lie opportunities for cooperation; Russia, per contra, sees it as its front porch and is not allowing any *trespassers*".<sup>80</sup> This dichotomy drives extremely different policies in the Black Sea region.

The drastic gap between a friendly area to do business and one's home that must be protected for survival not only exists between Russia and the EU, but also between the EU as a whole and the individual member states in the Black Sea region whose survival is threatened by an expansionist Russia. This makes sense as the smaller states in the Black Sea region suffer much swifter and more devastating consequences based on Russia's actions. Russian A2/AD and its supporting activities can be problematic or even damage some of the foreign policy interests of the United States and the EU members from Western Europe, but "for small states it could mean the loss of their very existence as sovereign entities. This is particularly problematic for small powers on the frontier that have no sufficient power to protect them from aggression in even its earliest phases."<sup>81</sup> These states have histories with Russia that go back hundreds of years. The expansionism of the Tsarist and Soviet empires has not been forgotten and Russia is always eyed warily by the Black Sea states. Not only has Putin begun actively taking steps that are all too familiar – invading states, annexing territories, and sending Russian troops permanently to other sovereign territories – he has started adding an A2/AD bubble in the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, which is a new challenge for Black Sea states.

Technically, to counterbalance and defend yourself against the A2/AD capabilities of a regional great power, the solution requires to invest and develop your own access-denial posture.<sup>82</sup> It is like a defensive conservation instinct. It has increasingly become the choice of many of the US allies across

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<sup>80</sup> Martin Sokolov, "Russia's Realpolitik and the Black Sea Security Dilemma", *Black Sea Security*, vol. 1, no. 29, 2017, p. 36.

<sup>81</sup> Jakub J. Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier: Rising Rivals, Vulnerable Allies, and the Crisis of American Power*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2016, p. 135.

<sup>82</sup> Iulia Joja and Octavian Manea, "2018 NATO Summit: Finally a focus on the Black Sea?", *RealClear Defense*, 11 July 2018, [https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/07/11/2018\\_nato\\_summit\\_finally\\_a\\_focus\\_on\\_the\\_black\\_sea\\_113596.html](https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2018/07/11/2018_nato_summit_finally_a_focus_on_the_black_sea_113596.html). (Accessed 15 July 2018).

the globe – Australia, Japan and Poland. It is also an option actively encouraged in Washington:

“what we need right now are allies on the frontlines in Europe and East Asia that really focus on defending their own sovereignty. In the past we wanted our allies to be a smaller version of the US military. Today we want our allies to look a lot like our adversaries, to develop their own A2/AD capabilities, to fend off the power projection gambits of potential aggressors”.<sup>83</sup>

Poland is a case in point. It is a country that designed its whole defensive philosophy around an A2/AD centric posture with the aim of transforming its territory into “a sanctuary for the allied freedom of movement”, with a component of deterrence by denial to discourage any Russian move against it. This is a traditional logic first advertised by the architect of the containment strategy, George Kennan: “we must be like the porcupine who only gradually convinces the carnivorous beast of prey that he is not a fit object of attack”.<sup>84</sup> A gradual “porcupine” deterrence posture (or even “deterrence via protraction”<sup>85</sup>) is also the logic that drives Romanian military acquisitions. The terminology has been introduced in the public talking points of the senior military leadership of the country. In the last few years, Bucharest made clear its interest to develop an IAMD (Integrated Air Missile Defense) system, acquire Patriot batteries and HIMARS rocket launchers as well as to invest in coastal defense. It is even contemplating developing a fleet of submarines.

Two of the three NATO countries in the Black Sea region haven’t taken many steps to create A2/AD umbrellas over their territory. Worse, they’ve made decisions and taken actions that appear to distance themselves from NATO in favor of Russia, or at a minimum try to balance the two against one another instead of clearly allying against Russian expansion in the Black Sea area. Bulgaria’s actions have been particularly problematic as it has “maintained especially close ties to Russia in the period since its NATO entry”.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, “Bulgaria still appears to be the weakest link in the Western alliance...[and] to be less worried about possible Russian aggression and more about angering policy makers in the Kremlin”.<sup>87</sup> It was the Bulgarian Prime

<sup>83</sup> Jim Thomas, “Readying the U.S. Military for Future Warfare”, House Committee on Armed Services, 30 January 2018, <https://armedservices.house.gov/legislation/hearings/readying-us-military-future-warfare>. (Accessed 18 May 2018).

<sup>84</sup> Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove. Paul Nitze, George Kennan, and the History of the Cold War*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2009, p. 100.

<sup>85</sup> Armand Goșu and Octavian Manea, “The Traits of Ambiguous Warfare: Russian Aggression in Ukraine”, Ottmar Trașcă and Virgiliu Țărău (eds.), *O Identitate secundă. Dennis John Deletant, Istoria, România și Românii*, Argonaut, Cluj-Napoca, 2016, pp. 575-576.

<sup>86</sup> Jakub J. Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier...cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>87</sup> Martin Sokolov, “Russia’s Realpolitik and the Black Sea...cit.”, p. 39.

Minister Boyko Borisov who put an end to a proposed tripartite naval alliance between Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania in 2016 by saying it was “not acceptable” without much further discussion as to why.<sup>88</sup> Borisov is still Prime Minister, but in 2016 a pro-Russian Socialist, Rumen Radev, won the Bulgarian presidency. Though Borisov is more supportive of the EU than Radev and the Socialists, both have called for a demilitarization of the Black Sea. Considering the modernization of the Black Sea Fleet and Russia’s exploits in Crimea, the demilitarization of the Black Sea would essentially result in a powerful Russian fleet with almost no NATO presence to act as a deterrent.<sup>89</sup> Belgian leadership is trying to balance its EU and NATO membership with a pragmatic, submissive approach towards Russia.

Turkey, despite its war-filled history with Russia over access and control in the Black Sea, has also yielded significant geopolitical ground to Russia in recent years. Russia’s treatment of Crimean Tatars, the closest ethnic relatives to Turks, has been abysmal. In Syria, Russia fought against the Turkish-backed Free Syrian Army and supported Assad and the People’s Protection Units (YPG) who are opposed by Turkey. Russia also has refused to recognize the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) as a terrorist organization, which Turkey claims they are, and Russian aircraft have repeatedly violated Turkish airspace. Russia has proven time after time that its “interests in Syria are Russia’s interests and not those of the wider international community”.<sup>90</sup> Russo-Turkish relations reached a low point following the downing of a Russian Su-24 in Turkish airspace by a Turkish F-16 in 2015. Russia quickly responded with crippling economic sanctions.<sup>91</sup> However, Turkish President Recep Erdogan later apologized for the incident and Russia was the first country to emphatically support his regime during the attempted coup of 2016.<sup>92</sup> These diplomatic gestures improved relations to the point that, in 2017, Russia lifted most of its economic sanctions and the two countries signed a \$2.5 billion-dollar agreement for Turkey to receive an S-400 SAM system. Turkey will be the only NATO country with a Russian SAM system and its integration

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

<sup>89</sup> Margarita Assenova, “Bulgaria’s Black Sea Dilemma”, *Center for European Policy Analysis*, 20 July 2016, <https://cepa.ecms.pl/Bulgaria-Black-Sea-dilemma>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

<sup>90</sup> Ryan Browne, “Top US General Says Russia is ‘Both Arsonist and Firefighter’ in Syria”, *CNN*, 27 February 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/27/politics/us-general-votel-russia-syria/index.html>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

<sup>91</sup> Selin Girit, “Turkey Faces Big Losses as Russia Sanctions Bite”, *BBC*, 1 January 2016, <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-lawmaker-turkeys-purchase-of-russian-missile-system-may-trigger-sanctions/>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

<sup>92</sup> Filiz Tutku Aydin, “Turkey’s Black Sea Policy: A Balancing Act or Russian Roulette?”, *Black Sea Security*, vol.1, no.29, p. 54.



into NATO defense is a cause of concern for many NATO leaders.<sup>93</sup> Air defense systems are an important part of A2/AD, but the S-400 isn't likely to deter any Russian aggression in the Black Sea. Turkey is still a NATO ally and still hosts US troops and equipment at Incirlik Air Base, but Erdogan is most concerned about consolidating his power; the power of Russia's economic sanctions and the lack of Western support following the coup has led him to look more favorably towards Russia. Moscow's efforts in Turkey aren't new to international relations:

“the revisionist's low-level cunning diplomacy that silently recruits allies to its side through elite bribery, internal destabilization, or economic pressuring is dangerous because it happens surreptitiously, and its effects are visible only when it becomes too late to alter them,” write Jakob Grygiel and Wess Mitchell.<sup>94</sup>

Increasingly close economic and political ties to Russia combined with diplomatic discord concerning the US and NATO makes Turkey a less reliable ally in the fight against Russian aggression and A2/AD development in the Black Sea region.

Romania, ever skeptical of Russian invasion, is at the vanguard of the aforementioned attempts to preserve its sovereignty and survival for as long as possible against the stronger Russian foe. Nearly all of the Central and Eastern European countries, Romania included, announced increases in their defense spending following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 with Slovakia being the lone exception.<sup>95</sup> However, Romania subsequently went further than most of its neighbors and announced in 2017 that it would become the sixth NATO country to meet the standard set at the 2014 Wales Summit of spending 2% of national GDP towards national defense.<sup>96</sup> It has maintained this policy despite concerns that domestic fiscal policies could be leading to economic problems for Romania in the near future and as inflation has recently hit 5%, its highest level since 2013,<sup>97</sup> which is an indication of how seriously it views the Russian threat

<sup>93</sup> Andrew Hanna, “US Lawmaker: Turkey's Purchase of Russian Missile System may Trigger Sanctions,” *Politico*, 15 September 2017, <https://www.politico.eu/article/us-lawmaker-turkeys-purchase-of-russian-missile-system-may-trigger-sanctions/>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

<sup>94</sup> Jakub J. Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier...cit.*, p.73.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 88.

<sup>96</sup> Paul McLeary, “With demands for more NATO spending, Romania steps up”, *Foreign Policy*, 3 May 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/05/03/with-demands-for-more-nato-spending-romania-steps-up/>. (Accessed 21 April 2018).

<sup>97</sup> Institutul Național de Statistică a României, “Rata Anuală a Inflației a fost de 5,0% în Luna Martie 2018”, [http://www.insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com\\_presa/com\\_pdf/ipc03r18.pdf](http://www.insse.ro/cms/sites/default/files/com_presa/com_pdf/ipc03r18.pdf), (Accessed 21 April 2018); Dinu Boboc, “Rata Anuală a Inflației a Urcat în Februarie la 4,72%, Cel Mai Mare Nivel din Iunie 2013”, *News.ro*, 13 March 2018,

to its national security. Deciding to devote the necessary resources is important, but allocating them in the right manner is even more important. Spending your entire budget on fifth-generation fighter aircraft, for example, doesn't make sense if you don't have the aviation expertise to fly them or the maintenance capability to keep them airborne.

Romania has effectively started implementing this plan already. In November 2017, Romania officially approved the purchase of seven Patriot missile defense systems and accompanying missiles from the United States at a cost that could total up to \$3.9 billion USD.<sup>98</sup> This contract was closely followed by the Romanian Government's decision in February 2018 to spend over \$1.5 billion USD to purchase three High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) from the United States.<sup>99</sup> The Patriot purchase gained a lot of notoriety because of its cost and because of the fame of the Patriot as a reliable and effective missile defense system. However, the HIMARS purchase might be more noteworthy because it's an offensive weapon system capable of firing six rockets up to 70 kilometers (43 miles) or one missile up to 300 kilometers (186 miles). This is the same range as the Bastion-P system and 75% of the range of the Russian Iskander-M system deployed to Crimea. Although, the HIMARS system can't reach Crimea from Romania, it's long range capability and rapid movement capability allow the Romanian military to station the missiles inland, well-protected by the Carpathian Mountains, and still provide coverage and protection against a potential coastal invasion from the Black Sea. In addition, the US Marine Corps was able to fire a HIMARS from a seaborne ship in October 2017, the first time this was achieved.<sup>100</sup>

If Romania was able to put its HIMARS systems on ships and send them into the Black Sea, they could easily hit Crimea and have a much stronger deterrent effect on Russia. Furthermore, Romania is using its status as a NATO member and its strategically important geopolitical position to improve its A2/AD umbrella. In 2014, Romania offered its territory as a location to host the United States Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System (AAMDS) in Deveselu.

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<https://www.news.ro/economic/rata-anuala-a-inflatiei-a-urcat-in-februarie-la-4-72-cel-mai-mare-nivel-din-iunie-2013-1313442018030917952602>. (Accessed 21 April 2018).

<sup>98</sup> Jen Judson, "It's Official: Romania Signs Deal to Buy US Missile Defense System", *Defense News*, 29 November 2017, <https://www.defensenews.com/land/2017/11/30/its-official-romania-signs-deal-to-buy-us-missile-defense-system/>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

<sup>99</sup> Irina Marica, "Romanian Government Approves HIMARS Missile Acquisition", *Romania-Insider*, 16 February 2018, <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-himars-missile-acquisition/>; "Romanian Senate Approves EUR 1.5 bln HIMARS Project", *Romania-Insider*, 20 February 2018, <https://www.romania-insider.com/romanian-senate-approves-himars>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

<sup>100</sup> Gidget Fuentes, "Marines Fire HIMARS from Ship in Sea Control Experiment with Navy", *USNI News*, 24 October 2017, <https://news.usni.org/2017/10/24/marines-fire-himars-ship-sea-control-experiment-navy>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

This system is part of the United States' European Phased Adapted Approach (EPAA) designed to provide ballistic missile defense to NATO and US allies in Europe against attacks from potential revisionist powers such as Russia and achieved initial operational capability in 2016.<sup>101</sup> In 2017, Romania established Headquarters Multinational Brigade – Southeast (HQ MN BDE-SE) in Craiova. Minister of Defense Mihai Fifor has stated his desire to have HQ MN BDE-SE fully operational by the end of 2018 and that he hopes an organization of this size and value will lead to “US troops’ presence...in a rotational manner, but for a longer period of time...because for Romania it’s important both the US presence and that of other states.”<sup>102</sup> Just like Russia, the Romanian government understands the value of troop presence as part of an A2/AD campaign. Since Romania’s military alone is not large enough to dissuade potential Russian aggression, bringing in additional NATO troops and having them permanently present on Romanian territory augments and fortifies a key part of Romania’s A2/AD bubble against Russia. All of these measures haven’t put Romania on equal footing with Russia, but they have made a notable impression. Senior foreign ministry official Alexander Botsan-Kharchenko recently said, “Romania’s stance and the stance of its leadership, who have turned the country into an outpost, is a clear threat for us”.<sup>103</sup>

There are still additional steps that Romania can and should take to strengthen its A2/AD presence in the Black Sea. Improved infrastructure including modernized highway and railroad transportation systems would allow for rapid deployment of Romanian troops stationed throughout the country and would profoundly enhance Romania’s ability to effectively optimize the rapid mobility features of the HIMARS system. As it stands now, the Romanian infrastructure system is a detriment to the type of troop and equipment mobility necessary to run an effective A2/AD operation. Another issue is Defense Minister Mihai Fifor’s recently announced plan to build three new submarines in a Romanian shipyard will be a boost to Romania’s defense industry but is not

<sup>101</sup> United States 6th Fleet Public Affairs, “What You Need to Know About Aegis Ashore Romania”, US Naval Forces Europe-Africa/US 6th Fleet, 11 May 2016, <http://www.c6f.navy.mil/news/what-you-need-know-about-aegis-ashore-romania>. (Accessed 21 April 2018).

<sup>102</sup> Rodica State, “DefMin Fifor Wants to Make Multinational Brigade in Craiova Operational by End of 2018”, *Agerpres*, 13 March 2018, <https://www.agerpres.ro/english/2018/03/13/defmin-fifor-wants-to-make-multinational-brigade-in-craiova-operational-by-end-of-2018--71917>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

<sup>103</sup> Quoted in Samuel Osborne, “Russia Calls Romania a ‘Clear Threat’ and NATO Outpost for Hosting US Missile Shield”, *Independent*, 9 February 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-romania-clear-threat-nato-outpost-us-anti-missile-shield-putin-tensions-a7510031.html>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

the best expense at the present time.<sup>104</sup> The submarines will be expensive to build and to maintain and it will take several years before Romanian sailors will be able to operate the submarines at a highly efficient level. The design of the submarines is for offense more than defense, and Romania doesn't have an expansionist military mindset or capability. Furthermore, they'll likely have limited impact facing the six *Kilo*-class submarines that Russia currently has in its Black Sea Fleet. Mining and other anti-submarine warfare (ASW) measures along the Romanian coast would be a more effective and much cheaper deterrent to Russian action in the Black Sea and along the Romanian coast. A final investment for Romania should be GLONASS jamming equipment. GLONASS jamming, as with GPS jamming is cheap and can be acquired through commercial means. Strategic application of GLONASS jamming zones can be a severe detriment to Russian designs to use precision strike weapons, GLONASS navigation in airplanes, or GLONASS-guided cruise missiles. These and similar upgrades would allow the Romanian Government to effectively use its budgetary allotment to create a viable and effective A2/AD bubble that could deter Russian revisionism in the Black Sea region and provide sufficient time for NATO reinforcements to arrive in the case of an attempted Russian invasion.

### Implications For The Alliance

As NATO and the EU have gradually extended their borders eastward, Russia now finds itself sharing the Black Sea with states that cannot compete with Russia individually, but can cause immense headaches as part of larger international organizations. All three countries have participated in joint exercises with NATO member countries and especially Bulgaria and Romania have historically invited and enjoyed the increased military presence in the Black Sea region.<sup>105</sup> However, as previously noted the level of support for NATO measures has been tempered in Bulgaria and Turkey and Russian revisionism is starting to change the geopolitical appearance of the region.

In international relations not only is it true that perception is reality, but, often, reality itself is negotiable. For an organization such as NATO or a country such as the US with global reach and global interests, there are two critical ways in which perception matters: credibility and reliability. The

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<sup>104</sup> Jaroslaw Adamowski, "Romania to Buy 3 Sub, 4 Ships to Bolster Black Sea Ops", *Defense News*, 9 February 2018, <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2018/02/09/romania-to-buy-3-sub-4-ships-to-bolster-black-sea-ops/>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

<sup>105</sup> F. Stephen Larabee and Stephen J. Flanagan, "The Growing Importance of Black Sea Security", *RAND Corporation*, 11 July 2016, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2016/07/the-growing-importance-of-black-sea-security.html>. (Accessed 21 May 2018).

perception of credibility is given by the adversarial or revisionist power (e.g. Russia), while the perception of reliability is relevant vis-à-vis the smaller allied states. A report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) explains, “There are 2 elements of credibility: intent and capability. Intent is based on the adversary’s perception that the defender *will* make good on what it says it will do. Capability refers to the adversary’s perception that the defender *can* make good on its commitments”.<sup>106</sup> The larger states’ reliability is determined based on how the smaller allies view its commitment to them. If the commitment, and by proxy the reliability, is considered low, then it creates a belief among the weaker states “that the alliance is fragile and that it may be in the small state’s interest to seek accommodation with the nearby revisionist power”.<sup>107</sup> Immediately following the annexation of Crimea, Turkey and Bulgaria still seemed to trust NATO, but their recent decisions, especially since 2016, indicate a low perception of reliability and a possible turn towards the regionalism of an expansionist Russia.

In some ways, these views may be justified. Russia has turned the tide in the Syrian war, allowing the government to retake Aleppo and severely crippling the anti-Assad resistance. It has maintained and cemented its control of Crimea. It was able to play a subversive role in the 2016 US Presidential election creating a political firestorm in the United States that is still undermining America’s traditional role in international politics nearly two years later. It has modernized and expanded its once powerful Black Sea Fleet, and it has substantially grown its A2/AD bubble in the Black Sea zone and the Eastern Mediterranean. It has achieved all of these goals with little resistance from the West beyond sanctions that, while relentless and damaging, don’t even have the full support of every NATO ally. The West must recognize that Putin views Russia as a great power determined to be treated as such internationally, understand that its smaller allies don’t have the luxury of time or economic power, and must adapt its approach accordingly to reassure its allies in the Black Sea region and Eastern Mediterranean.

This predicament is even direr after the July 2018 NATO summit in Brussels when the Black Sea focus remained at the very least marginal. The summit main lines of efforts prioritized measures to increase mobility, speed as well as NATO’s operational freedom of movement across the Alliance territory. It seems that the time for a Black Sea focus has not come. Romania’s call for a coherent, integrated, synchronized approach for the whole Eastern Flank, one that will fix the perceived imbalance between the Nordic and Southern parts of

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<sup>106</sup> Kathleen H. Hicks and Heather A. Conley, “Evaluating Future US Army Force Posture in Europe”, *CSIS Report*, 2016, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> Jakub J Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, *The Unquiet Frontier...cit.*, p. 59.

Eastern Flank, remained largely ignored. It is in this context that former NATO generals are pleading for a renewed focus on the Black Sea, a region that

“is just as important as the Baltic Sea. We’ve done a lot in the Baltic region. I believe the Black Sea region is going to be the key area where Russia will challenge the Alliance over the next 10-15 years and we’ve got to ensure credible deterrence there as well as provide support for our partners in the region”.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Octavian Manea, “A Tour of Horizon Interview with Lieutenant General Ben Hodges...cit.”.